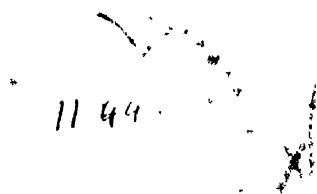


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THE BEAST MUST DIE

NICHOLAS BLAKE

The Beast Must Die



JOHN LEHMANN

CONTENTS

Part One

THE DIARY OF FELIX LANE 7

Part Two

SET PIECE ON A RIVER 82

Part Three

THE BODY OF THIS DEATH 99

Part Four

THE GUILT IS SEEN 188

EPILOGUE 207

FOR
EILEEN AND TONY

Part One

The Diary of Felix Lane

June 20th, 1937.

I AM GOING to kill a man. I don't know his name, I don't know where he lives, I have no idea what he looks like. But I am going to find him and kill him. . . .

You must pardon me this melodramatic opening, gentle reader. It sounds just like a first sentence out of one of my own detective-novels, doesn't it? Only this story is never going to be published, and the 'gentle reader' is a polite convention. No, not perhaps just a polite convention. I propose to commit what the world calls 'a crime'; every criminal, who has no accomplice, needs a confidante: the loneliness, the appalling isolation and suspense of crime are too much for one man to contain within him. Sooner or later he will blurt it all out. Or, if his will stands firm, his super-ego betrays him—that strict moralist within who plays cat-and-mouse with the furtive, the timorous or the cocksure alike, forcing the criminal into slips of the tongue, luring him into over-confidence, planting evidence against him, playing the agent provocateur. All the forces of law and order would be powerless against one man absolutely without conscience. But deep inside us all there exists that compulsion to make atonement—a sense of guilt, the traitor within the gates. We are betrayed by what is false within. If the tongue refuses to confess, the involuntary actions will. That is why the criminal returns to the scene of his crime. That is why I am writing this diary. You, my imaginary reader, hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère, are to be my confessor. I shall keep nothing back from you. It is you who will save me from the gallows, if any one can.